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FM AMCONSUL PESHAWAR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8057
INFO RUEHLH/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE 4830
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE IMMEDIATE 1934
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI IMMEDIATE 1942
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE 1568
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE 1201
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE 0783
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE IMMEDIATE 0832
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO IMMEDIATE 0783
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE 0967
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA IMMEDIATE 0877
RUEAAIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHMFSS/Joint Staff WASHINGTON DC
RHMFSS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHMFSS/CDR USSOCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PESHAWAR 000130

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PTER MOPS PGOV KISL PK
SUBJECT: BOLD TTP-CLAIMED ATTACKS SIGNAL A TEST OF WILLS WITH THE GOVERNMENT

REF: A) LAHORE 115; B) PESHAWAR 127; C) PESHAWAR 126; D) LAHORE 100; E) 2008 ISLAMABAD 3074; F) 2007 PESHAWAR 608

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REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Baitullah Mehsud's Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has claimed a series of bold attacks undertaken over June 9-12. These attacks highlight the TTP's increasing willingness to attack and claim credit for violence within military cantonments, in the Punjab, and against politically popular figures. While the TTP has in the past regularly hit government targets and public places, the recent attacks, particularly the assassination of highly respected Lahore cleric Dr. Naeemi, appear to be a raising of stakes in a contest of wills with the government of Pakistan in the run-up to the expected Pakistani government campaign in the Mehsud areas of South Waziristan Agency (SWA). It is unclear as yet whether this strategy will prove successful in sapping public support for the government's policy of confrontation or whether it will create a sustained reaction against the TTP; initial indicators point both directions. End summary.

TTP Acknowledges Its Work

¶2. (SBU) On June 13, TTP spokesman Qari Hussain claimed responsibility for three attacks over June 11-12: the two-stage suicide attack on a police checkpost outside of Peshawar (ref B); a suicide bombing attack on the Supply Depot mosque in the cantonment of Nowshera in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), and the suicide bombing attack on the madrassa of respected Barelvī leader Dr. Allama Sarfraz Naeemi in Lahore (ref A). These were the latest in a series of high-profile militant attacks that had also included the June 9 attack on the Pearl Continental Hotel (ref C).

¶3. (C) None of these attacks are different in type from actions undertaken in the past by the TTP. The TTP has destroyed major hotels before; most recently the Islamabad Marriott in September 2008 (ref E). It has attacked security forces targets before - notably the May 26 attack on the ISI Punjab headquarters in Lahore (ref D). Taken together, however, these attacks have features that point in some new directions.

Hitting cantonments...

¶4. (C) One clear feature has been TTP's increased ability and brazenness in penetrating Pakistan's cantonments. (Note: Cantonments are neighborhoods occupied primarily by military housing and installations where security is at a relatively higher level.) The Nowshera mosque bombing happened well within the military cantonment in that city (containing the headquarters of the Punjab Regiment). The bombing of the Pearl Continental Hotel similarly took place within the Peshawar cantonment, though closer to the edge. (Note: The June 12 violence outside the 11th Corps Commander's house now seems to have been largely a friendly fire incident resulting from nerves and poor coordination.)

¶5. (C) As most government offices and prominent officials' residences tend to be located within cantonments because of perceived security, this trend is one that directly affects much of the civil government as well. The Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) for the Federally Administered Tribal Agencies (FATA) told PO on June 11 that he had become unpopular with his colleagues

due to his repeated warnings that all of their facilities are vulnerable.

...the Punjab...

¶6. (C) Another trend, which has been apparent well before the past week, has been the TTP's willingness to strike within the Punjab. The TTP has traditionally limited most of its activity to the FATA and NWFP, along with occasional strikes on high-profile targets in Islamabad/Rawalpindi (e.g., the December 2007 Benazir Bhutto assassination in Rawalpindi and the Islamabad Marriott bombing). Since its March 2009 attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team and police training center in Lahore,

PESHAWAR 00000130 002 OF 002

however, the TTP appears to be growing bolder in its attacks in Punjab, most likely in cooperation with local Lashkar-i-Jhangvi elements who have provided the manpower. The attacks provide the TTP with the potential leverage that arises from bringing home the costs of the government's anti-TTP campaign directly to Pakistan's political center of gravity. While Punjab residents had previously been largely shielded from the militant violence as compared to other parts of the country, the attacks in Lahore have made the anti-Taliban operations more relevant to daily life in the country's second-largest city.

...and Politically Controversial Targets

¶7. (C) Finally, the attack on Dr. Naeemi marks a departure from past TTP practice. Dr. Naeemi is the first cleric with a major following whose killing the TTP has claimed. This action was unlike the earlier case of NWFP cleric Maulana Hassan Jan, who, like Naeemi, had spoken out against suicide bombings as "un-Islamic." After Maulana Hassan Jan was gunned down in his home in September 2007 (ref F), there was never any claim of responsibility. TTP, however, has quickly claimed responsibility for the killing of Dr. Naeemi. In part, the difference in TTP's willingness to claim the new assassination may lie in the lesser likelihood that the backlash from the killing will directly affect the organization. Maulana Hassan Jan was a respected Deobandi figure with a large following within Waziristan as well as outside of it, and too close an association with his death could have undercut TTP support within its core recruiting population. Naeemi's Barelvi followers, by contrast, were unlikely under any circumstances to find themselves joining up with the TTP. Even so, TTP's claim to have killed Naeemi marks the first time that the organization has publicly admitted to its involvement in a death of a popular public figure carrying the possibility of backlash.

Comment: Will TTP's Actions Crush or Bolster Public Resolve?

¶8. (C) The TTP has not historically shied away from confrontation, but the pattern of the past week seems to indicate that such inhibitions as it may have previously held are receding as military operations in South Waziristan loom. The attacks on cantonment targets, into the Punjab, and on a politically popular target who had rhetorically opposed TTP's actions represent a clear challenge to the government and to the popular forces supporting it. It is difficult to predict whether these actions will strengthen TTP's hand in its test of wills against the government or weaken it. On one hand, its attacks in and around the Peshawar area, in other parts of the NWFP, and into Punjab have made both the federal government and especially the NWFP provincial government appear weak and ineffective. Parties such as the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaf (PTI), and increasingly the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam - Fazlur Rehman (JUI-F) have vocally opposed the military operation against extremists in Malakand, and these voices show no signs of becoming muted.

¶9. (C) On the other hand, the TTP's apparent strategy has yet to produce a sustained ebbing of public support for operations against it, and at least in some circles, it seems to be having the opposite effect. A major June 13 demonstration in Lahore following the Naeemi madrassa bombing and the TTP claim of responsibility for it chanted anti-TTP slogans while shopkeepers observed a day of mourning. Political and religious leaders rushed to condemn the attack as well. The popular anger displayed here may be a sign that the TTP has finally crossed enough lines to turn the popular mood from fear or apathy to anger at the TTP's excesses. If the latter is indeed the case, it bodes well for the Pakistani government's resolve as it extends its anti-militant campaign into the forbidding territory of South Waziristan.

TRACY